



ACUTE LOW BACK PAIN

This brochure tells you about Acute Low Back Pain and how it is diagnosed, including what Imaging tests you may need to have.

What is Acute Low Back Pain?

Acute low back pain usually lasts for a few days to a few weeks. The pain in your lower back may range from an ache to a shooting pain down your leg. If your low back pain has lasted for more than 3 months, it is called *chronic* back pain.

Diagnosis

Acute back pain is very common and in most people will usually go away in a few days. **It does not normally need an x-ray or scan for diagnosis.**

Your doctor may request x-rays or a scan if:

- He/she thinks that something serious is causing your pain.
- If you have other symptoms due to compression of a nerve or the spinal cord.
- If your pain lasts several weeks and is not responding to treatment.

The following are considered the red alerts for backpain:

- Unexplained weight loss.
- Fever.
- History of cancer.
- Intravenous drug use.
- Osteoporosis or steroid use.
- Suspicion of ankylosing spondylitis.
- Age >70.
- Recent significant trauma or milder trauma in age >50.
- Compromised immune system
- Compensation issues.

Depending on these, your doctor may request an x-ray, CT, MRI or bone scan.

If an x-ray is done first, the x-ray results will show your doctor whether you need any other scans and which ones you should have.

Results:

A Radiology doctor will look at your scans and write a report for your doctor.

Further Information

For more detailed information, please see [InsideRadiology](#), a resource produced especially for consumers by the [Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists](#).

If you would like to look at other relevant brochures, please see

- [Plain x-ray](#)
- [CT Scan](#)
- [MRI Scan](#)
- [Bone Scan](#)
- [Radiation risks of x-rays and scans](#)

Or log into the Diagnostic Imaging Pathways website - www.imagingpathways.health.wa.gov.au/includes/consumer.html

or

If you have questions or require any further information please contact your doctor.

Consumer Participation

This information has been reviewed by representatives from the following groups:

- Aboriginal people
- People with disabilities
- Seniors
- CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse)
- The Health Consumer's Council.

Feedback

The Division of Imaging Services, Royal Perth Hospital is committed to providing a friendly and professional service. If you would like to provide feedback on this information sheet, please send to:

Quality Coordinator
Imaging Services
Royal Perth Hospital
GPO Box X2213
Perth WA 6000

References

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, Low Back Pain Fact Sheet, www.ninds.nih.gov

Website

For more information go to www.imagingpathways.health.wa.gov.au

Copyright

© Copyright 2009, Department of Health Western Australia. All Rights Reserved.

This web site and its content has been prepared by The Department of Health, Western Australia. The information contained on this web site is protected by copyright.

Legal Notice

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. It is not definitive and The Department of Health, Western Australia can not accept any legal liability arising from its use. The information is kept as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that it is always subject to change.

